

News Release



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Mining fatalities fall to all-time low in 2009 ***34 mining deaths in US is record-setting number***

ARLINGTON, Va. – Preliminary data from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released today indicate that mine fatalities in 2009 fell to an all-time low for the second straight year. Coal mines recorded 18 mining deaths, and metal/nonmetal mines recorded 16 mining deaths, for a combined total of 34 mining deaths nationwide and a significant drop from last year’s total of 53 deaths.

“No one should have to die for a job,” said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. “Our nation’s miners, like all workers, deserve jobs that allow them to provide for themselves and their families. No job is truly good unless it is safe, and the U.S. Department of Labor is committed to ensuring safety is priority one in our nation’s mines.”

“This decline in numbers is a testament to the commitment of miners, mine operators, MSHA, the Department of Labor and other members of the mining community in making safety and health our top concern,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “At the same time, we are ever mindful that these numbers represent a tragic loss to the families and friends of the 34 victims. We will not rest until we reach zero fatalities in mining.”

According to Main, a key factor contributing to the record low number of deaths include enforcement of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 (which succeeded the 1969 Mine Act) and continued implementation of the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response (MINER) Act, enacted by Congress in 2006.

In 2009, MSHA assessed 173,000 civil penalties for violations of mine safety and health legal requirements. The dollar amount of assessed penalties totaled \$140.7 million in 2009. Twenty-five flagrant violations were assessed at a total of \$3.4 million.

Of the 34 fatalities reported, 11 coal miners and 14 metal/nonmetal miners died at surface mines, while seven coal miners and two metal/nonmetal miners died at underground facilities. Seven coal miners and five metal/nonmetal miners died in accidents involving powered haulage, the leading cause of all fatal mining accidents in the U.S. during 2009. From Oct. 19, 2008, to June 9, 2009 – a nearly eight-month period – no underground coal mine fatalities were reported, with the total number of underground coal mine deaths about half the previous historic low.

Main emphasized that, while the numbers indicate vast improvements in safety, much work remains to be done on the health side. To that end, MSHA launched a comprehensive program last month to end new cases of black lung among the nation’s coal miners. Based on recent data from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, cases of black lung are increasing among the nation’s coal miners. Even younger miners are showing evidence of advanced and debilitating lung disease from excessive dust exposure.

MSHA gathers mining fatality data from the 50 states, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. To view these statistics, go to <http://www.msha.gov>. Under the “statistics” heading, click on “fatality charts.”

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